

## REALITY-STRATEGIES-PRACTICE: TEACHER WITH PROBLEMATIC CHILDREN IN CLASS SITUATION

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*In spite of the fact that nearly every class has difficult students (such as children facing integration problems, children who are under-motivated, aggressive or have other behavioural problems), during situations involving violence in school the conclusion is always the same: teachers are not prepared for these situations and they don't have enough tools to prevent them. Hungarian teacher education system is rather theoretical. Therefore, due to the lack of developing practical skills and abilities, many teachers feel helpless and puzzled in unexpected situations (like mobiles in classroom, drugs, bullying etc.). The following article attempts to answer the questions below: 1. What kind of competence do future teachers need to be prepared for managing behavioural problems and to face different school-situations successfully? 2. What do candidates need during the theoretical preparation of teacher education to be able to transfer their theoretical knowledge of pedagogy into useful (practical) skills? 3. Why is it important for future teachers to learn to create own pedagogical and didactic strategies?*

**Keywords:** problematic classroom situations, difficult students, teachers' education, teachers' strategies

Recent surveys show that school violence is a highlighted topic of the media, the educators and the public (Aáry & Aronson, 2010). During situations involving violence in school the conclusion is always the same: teachers are not prepared for these situations and they don't have enough tools to prevent them.

Nearly every class has difficult students such as children facing integration problems, children who are under-motivated, aggressive or have other behavioural problems. Teachers' education does not place enough emphasis and leave space for candidates to examine facts, possibilities, and their own opinions. However most teacher agree that during the teaching process their most difficult role is classroom management, motivating and discipline (Nagy, 2009).

I have been employed as a schoolteacher of a special group of disadvantaged youth (15-18 years) in vocational school for some years now. My students have little schooling due to their difficult social background. During the teaching process I had to face many challenging situation (aggressive behaviour, discipline, drug problem, under-motivation, difficult parents etc.). Based on my experience I found it useful to create a *Guide* for teacher candidates on teaching difficult pupils (Orgoványi-Gajdos, 2011).

This guide is part of a larger project that aims at developing teacher education in southern Hungary. The guide contains excerpts of class situations, resource packages and activities for further elaboration.

In this article I present the theoretical background of my *Guide* based on constructive pedagogy and interactive and reflective learning to demonstrate what kind of practical approach is necessary and why in teacher education.

In my opinion the problem is that Hungarian teacher education is rather theoretical. Therefore there is a big gap between theoretical preparation and everyday school situations (Falus, 2006). The former provides *theoretical* and scientific *knowledge* of pedagogy and psychology while the latter requires *practical skills and abilities*.

Teaching is a practical activity. Although teacher education mainly aims at developing knowledge rather than improving candidates' functional and flexible skills that are essential for everyday practice (Kagan, 1992). So candidates have difficulties to find the connection and bridge the gap between theory and reality.

THEORY	EVERYDAY TEACHING PRACTICE
(teacher education)	(reality)

However teacher education in Hungary is mainly divided into theoretical preparation (university lectures) and pedagogical practice (in partner schools). Most beginner teachers experience “reality shock” in their first year. Even many experienced teacher feel helpless and puzzled in unexpected school or classroom situations (like discipline, drugs, child bullying etc.).

*What kind of approach can help teacher candidates to prepare for unexpected classroom situations?* – Theoretical preparation should provide a more practical approach that can help candidates to transform their knowledge into useful skills for analysing and understanding pedagogical situations. The theoretical background is highly important but without transforming it to useful practical skill it will not be successfully used even during the teaching process (Pearson, 1989; Csapó, 2004).

*What do candidates need during theoretical preparation to be able to transfer their theoretical knowledge of pedagogy into useful (practical) skills?* – One way of transforming theory into practice is creating strategies. To be able to use pedagogical knowledge in practice teacher candidates need to build their own educational (pedagogical and didactic) *strategies*. However due to time and practical constraints creating strategies is a missing element of the teacher education.

THEORY	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	PRACTICE
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*Why is it important to learn to create own strategies?* – Without creating strategies teachers can not use their knowledge of pedagogy and solve any problematic classroom situation efficiently and successfully. It is impossible to handle inappropriate (bad, disruptive) or serious (violent) misbehaviour or disturbing group process without conflict management strategies, disciplinary strategies, problem-solving strategies, community building strategies etc. In order to face with these challenges teacher candidates need to create their own *strategies* in discipline, community building, conflict management etc.

Strategy is more than using a method, tool end so on. Strategy is answer the questions: *what* tool, method etc. I will use; *when* I will use it; *why* I will

use this tool and *how* I will use it. Strategy has reason, purpose, aim and direction. Professional strategy is based on good choices, wise decisions and perfect usage.

It is difficult to tell what exactly we have to do to solve a classroom problem because every situation is different and depends on many factors (class, students' and teachers' personality, teacher-student connection). There is no one right answer or solution because there are no two similar teachers. What works for one person may not work for others. I do not believe general strategies. There are numerous methods, tools, techniques, organizational ways as general strategies that can be basic element for personal adaptation. So general strategy can be a part of own strategy but it can not be instead of own strategy. On the other hand in my opinion educational strategy is not something that comes from the outside but teachers generate it by their competencies, personality, former experiences, impressions, metacognitive processes.

This article does not aim to give general teacher strategies of problematic class situation because there are many literature on it. Rather, this article attempts to offer a way of theoretical preparation that can help teacher candidates to develop *their own educational strategies* during teacher education.

Creating pedagogical strategies is an interpretation process of a *real* situation where we construct a solution, based on our personal attitude, knowledge, ability and former experiences for a certain aim by taking circumstances and conditions into consideration.

REALITY                      STRATEGIES                      PRACTICE

Candidates can create their strategies if they are aware of the *reality* of the classroom situation aware of the challenges of being a (good) teacher. So theoretical preparation should based on real school situations too because these are the challenges teachers have to face, respond to and reflect with developed personal strategies during the *everyday teaching practice*. Effective pedagogic and didactic strategy must be consistent, consequent, reasoned and explicit.

Teachers in many cases are not prepared for problematic situations because:

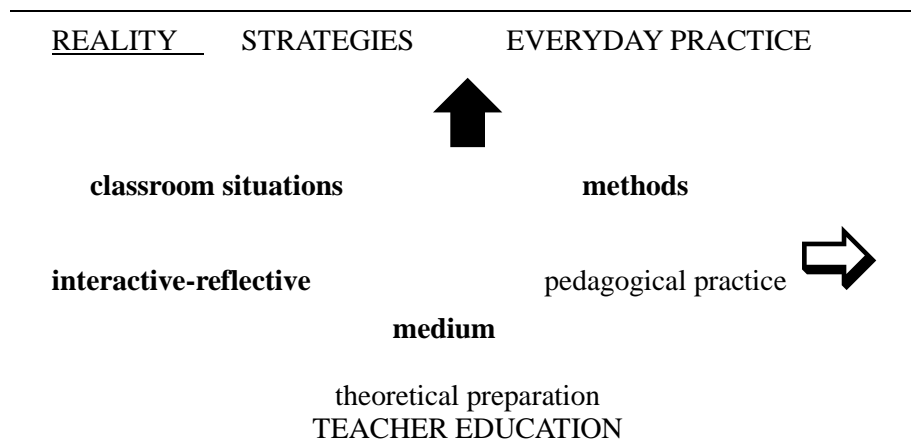
- a) they are facing the problems just as they it happens
- b) they have no strategies
- c) therefore they have nothing to turn into a working strategy so they are helpless and powerless in the situation or they try to do something suddenly that has no structure and therefore cause more problems or lead to chaos.

REALITY                      STRATEGIES                      EVERYDAY PRACTICE



TEACHER EDUCATION

*What kind of theoretical course during teacher education can help candidates to create personal strategies?* – For creating personal strategies of classroom management and discipline theoretical preparation needs to pay more attention to the topic of difficult classroom situations, demonstrate successful and inefficient examples and provide an interactive and reflective learning medium during seminars.



### Topic of difficult classroom situations

During teacher education candidates should be aware of the challenges and face the *reality* of problematic classroom and school situation by working with up-to-date topic. Therefore theoretical preparation should highlight real question and problems (drugs, mobile, bullying, aggressive behaviour, under-motivated student, discipline, handling parents etc.) to show candidates what it means to be a teacher nowadays and what sort of tasks and difficulties teachers have to face.

It is important because it gives candidates the possibilities:

- ❖ to get a real picture of the world of school, classroom and teacher role,
- ❖ to deal with delicate questions and difficulties,
- ❖ to recognise the background of students' behavioural problems,
- ❖ to avoid "reality shock".

### Methods

Theoretical preparation should demonstrate useful and practical information by recounting experiences, ideas, tools, methods, techniques, organizational ways to handle difficult children and classroom situation.

It is important because it gives candidates possibilities:

- to meet *good practice and strategies*,
- to meet different solutions of the same pedagogical problem,
- to learn different educational and pedagogical tools, methods, techniques, organizational way etc. to handle class, students and parents,
- to select and adopt ideas,
- to possess informations of where they can turn to for help.

### Interactive and reflective medium

According to the constructivist approach any learning process is a constructive process (Nahalka, 2002). Creating strategies is also a personal constructive learning process. University seminars should provide teacher candidates opportunities to develop their own personal strategies of discipline and of other problematic school situation. Therefore, theoretical preparation of teachers' education should ensure interactive and reflective medium by special activities. It was Ildikó Bárdossy and her colleagues that

draw attention the importance of interactive and reflective learning in the Hungarian teachers' education (Bárdossy, Dudás, Pethóné & Priskinné, 2003). In this learning situation it is more important to provide questions for the candidates to stimulate problem-oriented common thinking by conversation or debate instead of giving one answer. So that it is not the lecturer who tell the candidates what is the solution in different school situations but the candidates themselves who find their own answers by the activities.

It is important because an interactive and reflective medium of seminars gives candidates the possibilities:

- to share their opinion and former experiences,
- to explore their own and each others' view about teacher's role / the school's role / child motivation / discipline,
- to debate difficult questions,
- to analysing class situations and pedagogical decisions,
- to explain the background of their decision or choice,
- to respond to challenges.

Let's see a few ideas of activities for interactive and reflective seminar:

- analysing and discuss article or research about school violence (facts, reasons and solutions),
- analysing and discuss the candidates former classroom experience about discipline and classroom management,
- collecting, observing and analysing methods, techniques, organizational ways, ideas, tools for classroom management, discipline and for getting students motivated,
- inviting beginning and experienced teachers for the seminar and make interview and debate them about problematic school situations,
- visiting places such as orphanage, educational consultant etc. and observe who and how handle difficult students,
- generating debate connecting difficult classroom situations etc.

Since 2006 there is a regulation for competence based teacher education in Hungary. In global according to the regulation teachers should be able to improve students' personality; to improve and manage group process; to plan pedagogical process according to the conditions and circumstances; to understand and value their pedagogical experiences by reflective thinking; to improve students' competences including knowledge, ability, skill and attitude; to get students ready for life long learning; to be able to organize the lesson effective and interactive by using variable organizational way and info-communication techniques; to cooperate effectively with students, parents and colleges. Highlighting some details of the regulation teachers should be able to know the reasons and the solution of children facing integration problems, children who are under-motivated, aggressive or have other behavioural problems; to analyse problematic classroom situation; to use discipline techniques for prevention and correction.

As it seems that the task and the role of the teacher is very complex and it has more aspect. Beside their pedagogical and psychological knowledge teachers should posses different abilities and skills too. One important competence is to be able to create and use pedagogical and didactic strategy. Despite the similarities every school situation is different. Teachers can answer the challenges successfully only if they can create strategies by their own. That is why competence based teacher education requires more

practical approaches from the University including getting enable future teachers to create different strategies by their own.

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